No place like home

The Lake District's earliest residents were highly mobile, and lived in caves or temporary shelters near the coast. Gradually, people moved inland, clearing woodland and creating fields, and their homes became part of the landscape we know today.

The area has a wealth of historic homes, some grand, some simple, some ruined, some lovingly restored. Each has its own character, telling us something about its occupants and how they lived.

This leaflet introduces you to some of the most fascinating examples. The fold-out map tells you more about them and shows you where they are.

You may find Ordnance Survey Landranger maps 90, 96 and 97 helpful.

Preserving the past

Though they've survived hundreds or thousands of years, archaeological sites can easily be damaged. Please help preserve the Lake District's heritage by leaving places exactly as you found them.

Unlocking the past, understanding the present

Think of the Lake District and you'll probably think of nature at its most sublime. But this spectacular landscape is far from natural.

People have lived here for some 12,000 years. Their actions have shaped the landscape we see today, just as our actions will shape the landscapes of tomorrow.

They've left behind a wealth of evidence, from barely-visible hut circles to triumphs of Victorian engineering.

The six leaflets in this series help you explore this evidence. The maps and site details suggest where to go and what to look out for.

They're your key to unlocking the Lake District's past and understanding its present.
House-hunting  
A guide to some of the Lake District’s most fascinating past homes

1. Gaitscale
We don’t know why this farmstead was abandoned. Documents show that people lived here between 1686 and 1771, but by the early 19th century it was a ruin. Today you can make out the farmhouse, barns, sheep pens and old field boundaries. The name has Norse origins. Gaits means ‘goat’ and scale means ‘sheiling’ or seasonal house. This suggests there was a settlement here long before the 17th century. Managed by the National Trust.

Location: Grid ref NY255022. 12 kilometres (7.5 miles) west of Ambleside, between Wrynose Pass and Cockley Beck. Limited roadside parking 1.3 kilometres (0.8 miles) west of the pass, then footpath west for 1 kilometre (0.6 mile).

2. Mirehouse
Mirehouse has been a family home since 1688 when its original owner, the Earl of Derby, sold it to his local agent. It was once smaller, but has been added to over the centuries. Wordsworth and other famous poets were regular guests here. The house is still lived in by the Speedling family, who inherited it in 1802, and is open to visitors twice a week for half the year (details on Mirehouse website, see Find out more). The grounds are open every day.

Location: Grid ref NY232283. On A591, 5 kilometres (3 miles) north of Keswick. Entry charge.

3. Townend Statesman’s House
This perfectly preserved 17th century house gives you a glimpse into the life of a comfortably-off farming family. It was built in 1626 for George Browne, a newly-married ‘statesman’ farmer, whose family continued to live here for over 300 years. The house was extended in the late 1600s, but has hardly changed since that time. It includes some beautiful carved furniture made for the Browns. Managed by the National Trust.

Email: townend@nationaltrust.org.uk or 015394 32628.

Location: Grid ref NY406020. Troutbeck, 3.5 kilometres (2.2 miles) north of Windermere. Entry charge.

4. Barnscar Romano-British Settlement
This isolated site was a substantial settlement in Roman times. But the residents would have been British, and were clearly not keen on new-fangled Roman house designs! You can see the remains of at least six round houses, and three large enclosures for livestock. On the nearby slopes are field boundaries and a trackway leading to the farmstead. There are signs, too, of a medieval ‘sheiling’ overlying the settlement.

Location: Grid ref SD122959. On Birkby Fell, 3 kilometres (1.9 miles) south east of Muncaster Castle. Roadside parking at Devoke Water, then follow bridleway for 4 kilometres (2.5 miles).

5. Brantwood Bark Peelers’ Hut
In the Lake District’s older woodlands you may see low, circular stone walls with traces of a hearth. These were huts where bark peelers lived in summer. Their job was to remove bark from oak trees, before the trees were coppiced, to supply local tanneries. Their families made woodland products like brooms and clothes-pegs. There’s a reconstructed hut in the grounds of Brantwood House. Don’t miss the house itself, once the home of Victorian intellectual John Ruskin.

Location: Grid ref SD312958. Brantwood, 2 kilometres (1.2 miles) south east of Coniston or 4.5 kilometres (2.8 miles) south west of Hawkshead. Ferry from Coniston. Entry charge.

Find out more at:
www.lake-district.gov.uk  
www.brantwood.org.uk  
www.blackwell.org.uk  
www.mirehouse.com  
www.visitcumbria.com  
www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Key to symbols
Railway station
Bus stop
Car park
Footpath
Rough track
Access for wheelchair users
National Park boundary
For bus and train times please contact traveline on 0871 200 22 33.

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6. Blackwell
Designed by the famous architect M H Baillie-Scott and completed in 1900, this was a country retreat for a wealthy Manchester industrialist. It’s a perfect example of the ‘Arts & Crafts’ style fashionable at the time, on the cusp between Victorian and modern design. The stunning interior has survived more-or-less intact. Today, after restoration of the house and garden, it’s open to the public with period rooms and exhibition galleries. Managed by the Lakeland Arts Trust.

Location: Grid ref SD400945. 2.5 kilometres (1.6 miles) south of Bowness-on-Windermere. Entry charge.

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